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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001527

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS.

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [PINR](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: CO-CHAIRS SEE LITTLE PROSPECT OF A
NEAR-TERM RETURN TO PEACE TALKS

REF: A. COLOMBO 1523

[B.](#) COLOMBO 1509

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR ROBERT O. BLAKE, JR., REASONS 1.
4(b,d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: A meeting of Co-Chair Ambassadors in Colombo on November 5 concluded there will be little scope for promoting new peace talks in the next several months. Participants agreed to propose to capitals that the Co-Chairs principals meet during the first quarter of 2008 in Tokyo. Several partners observed a need to reposition the Co-Chairs to make them more effective, possibly by enlarging the membership. The Japanese, however, felt that Sri Lanka might perceive this as the international community "ganging up" against it. The Norwegian Embassy has decided to redirect its efforts to engage the Sinhalese Buddhist majority more intensively. European Co-Chair Ambassadors did not think the Tamil Diaspora could help much to break the downward spiral of the conflict, since it is strongly pro-LTTE. Norwegian interlocutors tell us the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission has increasing difficulty finding a useful role and are worried that the Supreme Court may rule the Ceasefire Agreement unconstitutional when the case comes up at the end of November. Foreign Minister Bogollagama told Ambassador on November 7 that the GSL would bring forward its devolution proposal later this month, after winning the budget vote. Co-Chairs have become skeptical about both the timing and the content of this proposal. End summary.

¶2. (C) At a meeting in Colombo on November 5 of the Sri Lanka Co-Chair Ambassadors, all participants believed that the Co-Chairs need to recalibrate their role, given the stalemate in the peace process and the virtual death of the CFA. They agreed that it is essential to act constructively in the current difficult climate and focus (largely bilaterally but, where appropriate, collectively) on issues such as human rights and humanitarian assistance. These are only indirectly related to peace negotiations, which all concluded are months away, at best. The EU Commission

country representative commented that it remains important for those members of the Co-Chairs that do talk to the LTTE to maintain dialogue and keep open the lines of communication.

¶3. (C) Co-Chair Ambassadors expressed interest in holding another meeting of Co-Chair principals in the first quarter of 2008, saying it would provide an opportunity to re-position Co-Chairs and demonstrate that they have not become irrelevant. It would be Japan's turn to host. It was agreed to propose this to capitals. There was some discussion of enlarging Co-Chair membership as part of a recalibration process. The UK High Commissioner, representing the Portuguese presidency of the EU, opined that a reinvention and enlargement of the group would be useful because the Co-Chairs are closely associated with the CFA, which all acknowledged to be a dead letter. Japan was opposed to an enlargement of Co-Chair membership, however, saying it would be viewed by the GSL as "ganging up" and could therefore be counterproductive.

DIASPORA TAMILS STRONGLY PRO-LTTE

¶4. (C) DCM pointed out to Co-Chair members that one avenue may be to engage the Diaspora in bringing pressure on the LTTE. However, the Norway, UK and EU representatives observed that the Tamil Diaspora in their countries is extremist and strongly pro-LTTE, to a degree not seen in the Tamil community here. For example, in Norway, the Diaspora asks why the international community remained silent when the GSL regained the East, in violation of the CFA.

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CURRENT CLIMATE EMBOLDENS EXTREMISTS ON BOTH SIDES

¶5. (C) The Norwegian Ambassador noted that the extremist approach of the Rajapaksa government works to the advantage of the LTTE by fanning international criticism of the government and creating domestic opposition to the GSL on the part of moderate Tamils and civil society. The Norwegian Embassy is therefore beginning to engage more broadly, making a concerted effort to reach out to the Sinhalese South. The Norwegian Political Chief related to us separately that he and his Ambassador had just returned from meeting with the Buddhist spiritual leaders, the Mahanayake monks, at the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy - something, he noted ruefully, they should have done much sooner.

¶6. (C) The Norwegian political officer also pointed out that the CFA, long moribund, is increasingly irrelevant. The Nordic-led Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) has long since abandoned counting violations or "ruling" them against either side. He said the SLMM is having trouble finding a new niche. Norway would like to maintain the SLMM as a mechanism to help resolve the conflict, should the opportunity arise, he said, observing that it would be quite difficult to reconstitute the SLMM once it passed out of existence. However, he noted that the Supreme Court is expected to rule on the case against the CFA by the end of November. Based on the fact that it agreed to consider the case, we believe it likely that it will overrule the Appeals Court and hold that the CFA was invalid under the Sri Lankan Constitution from its inception (ref b).

APRC PROCESS STALLED; OUTCOME UNCERTAIN

¶7. (C) The Co-Chairs agreed that a political solution to the conflict is needed, but did not believe that an All Party Representative Committee proposal would emerge until late December, at the earliest. There was a general sense of pessimism and disappointment regarding the APRC process. The EU Ambassador said that in a recent meeting with Tissa

Vitharana he implied that he was frustrated and felt he had been politically used by the GSL, although Vitharana did not explicitly state this.

¶18. (C) In a meeting with Ambassador Blake and Pol Chief on November 7 (septel), Foreign Minister Bogollagama confided that the government expected to be able to bring forward the APRC proposal in mid-December, once it has won the budget vote. Ambassador welcomed the news, but noted that the content of the proposal mattered a great deal. If it did not sketch out a devolution scheme that could attract the support of moderate Tamils living in government-controlled areas, including the Tamil ministers in the government, then it also would be inadequate to form the basis for a settlement of the conflict, further disappointing Sri Lanka's friends in the international community. Bogollagama said that is understood in the GSL.

¶19. (C) COMMENT: As the Norwegian Ambassador noted, the widening gulf between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities since President Rajapaksa came into office is demonstrated by the reaction to the November 2 death of Tamilchelvan -- open jubilation by large sectors of the public in the south, while the average Tamil felt a sense of loss. At the same time, the current cycle of tit-for-tat retaliation threatens to plunge the country back into full-scale war. The Indian government has given little indication to date that it sees an opportunity to effect positive change at this point. We agree with our Norwegian colleagues that while we await such an opening, it is worth trying to preserve CFA mechanisms such as the SLMM, as assets that could be reactivated and redeployed once the warring parties decide to talk again.

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